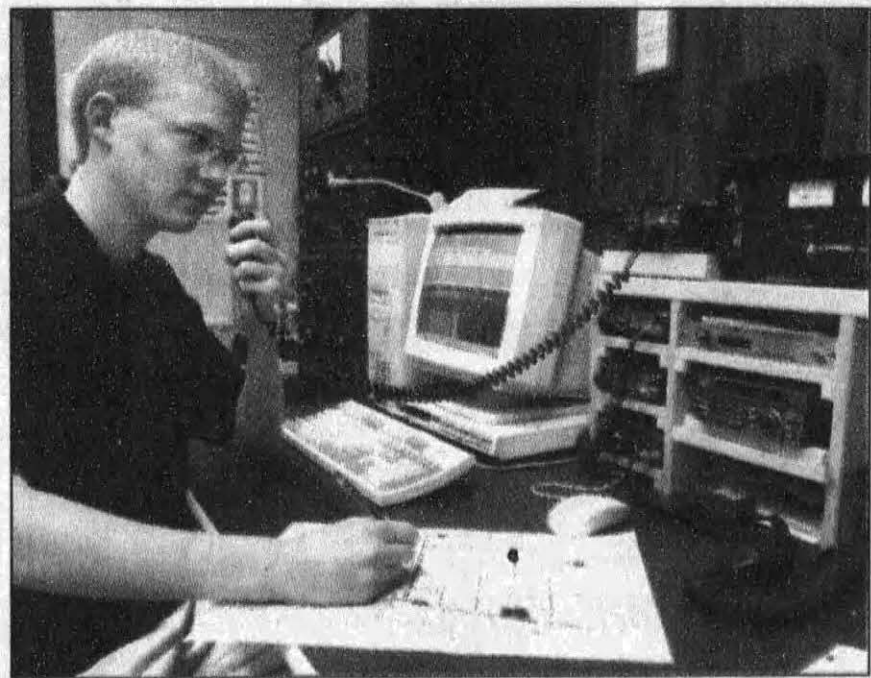


Young ham radio operator hears 'call'



Tim Swoboda/HTR

Travis Waack operates amateur radio equipment located in the Manitowoc Parks and Recreation building. Waack, a junior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, is licensed to operate ham radios and is an assistant emergency coordinator for the Manitowoc County ARES/RACES.

BY MICHELLE KUBITZ

Herald Times Reporter

MANITOWOC — When Manitowoc County Emergency Government took part last month in a nuclear plant drill, members of the federal government were particularly impressed with the efforts of one team member who helped keep communications running.

Travis Waack isn't a veteran of law enforcement, government or emergency management. He's a junior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School. And he operates ham radios.

Waack has operated ham radios for about three years, his interest spurred by a book he found at the Goodwill from the Cold



War civil defense era with the word RACES written inside the cover.

RACES is the acronym for the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service, a national organization founded in 1952.

Waack, 16, is licensed to operate ham radios and is an assistant emergency coordinator for the Manitowoc County ARES/RACES.

In the event of a national or local emergency that

would wipe out more traditional methods of communication, members of the Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) and RACES are available to provide communication services for government agencies.

"If communications went down or we had pockets of communication that didn't work or didn't have radio links, we would use ham radios to augment the communication shortfall," said Nancy Crowley, emergency management director for Manitowoc County.

Waack got into ham radios for emergency communications. "I got into it for that and I've stuck with that," he said.

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HAM

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As backup, ham radios "are so versatile. We can run off of a generator, batteries. We even have handheld radios," Waack said.

To hear Waack explain it, operating ham radios is more than a hobby for him.

"It's not a hobby. This is my life. This is my sport. And

it takes a lot of time, especially since I've gotten into the planning and management-type of phase with (RACES)," he said.

Besides his work with RACES, Waack also volunteers his time with the American Red Cross and their Disaster Action Team and as a net control operator for SkyWarn, a cooperative effort between communities and the National Weather Service.

In the future, Waack wants to become an emergency man-

ager "or something in the public service emergency field," he said.

Waack is the son of Steve and Joan Waack. His parents, along with his school, have been very supportive of his endeavor.

"My parents are wonderful. They let me put up antennas when I want to ... they've been great," he said.

Upon completion of last month's nuclear plant drill, the Federal Emergency Manage-

ment Association made a special note of Waack's participation in their report, Crowley said.

Participants in the drill were "overwhelmed with his poise," said Fred Neuenfeldt, emergency coordinator for the Manitowoc County ARES/RACES.

"They were overjoyed. They couldn't fathom having a high school teenager at the drill working with them," he said.

"He's just a very sharp young man," Crowley said.